

“THE RISING OF THE NEW SUN”:  
TIME WITHIN SINDIWE MAGONA’S *MOTHER TO MOTHER*  
AND ZAKES MDA’S *HEART OF REDNESS*

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western  
Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts in English.

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April 2011

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee Dr. Laura Wright, Dr. Elizabeth Heffelfinger, and Dr. Nyaga Mwaniki for their assistance and support while writing my thesis. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Wright for her direction, motivation, and encouragement throughout the research, writing, and editing process.

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## ABSTRACT

### “THE RISING OF THE NEW SUN”: TIME WITHIN SINDIWE MAGONA’S *MOTHER TO MOTHER* AND ZAKES MDA’S *HEART OF REDNESS*

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This thesis takes a postcolonial perspective; however, it also utilizes theories on time and culture from an anthropological foundation. To fully understand how Magona and Mda present time, I first examine the nature of time in the Xhosa culture. This exploration includes the beliefs and traditional perspectives concerning cyclical time versus linear progression. I present research the perspectives time, death, and memory, and reveal how Mda and Magona include elements of the Xhosa time consciousness in their novels. To highlight the intricacies of cyclical time in *Mother to Mother* and *Heart of Redness*, I explore the development of the traditional concepts of western time. While I utilize research revealing specific principles of time as a unit of measurement, I will utilize explorations into the psychological nature of time; while these theories are primarily used to explore human consciousness, I wish to show how Mda and Magona blur the definition of past and present within the novels. In blurring the past and the present, Mda and Magona mirror the action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and speak reconciliation to the new South Africa; lastly, I explore the ways in which *Mother to Mother* and *Heart of Redness* exemplify Benedict Anderson’s concept of an imagined community.

CHAPTER 1:  
 “THE SUN WILL RISE” –  
 TIME IN THE XHOSA CATTLE KILLING AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATION

*“We hope that the commission will contribute to the process of healing a traumatized and wounded people. We open wounds only in order to cleanse them, to deal with the past effectively and so to close the door on that dark and horrendous past forever. Together we can turn to the present and the future. Then we will be able to work for a prosperous and reconciled South Africa.”*

*~ Desmond Tutu Section 1 of the TRC, Message from the Chairperson*

With the first democratic, multi-race elections in 1994, and the appointment of Nelson Mandela as the African National Congress (ANC) representative, South Africa began the laborious task of dismantling the 45 year old state-sanctioned, racial segregation of apartheid. During his 1948 election campaign, D. F. Malan introduced the term “apartheid,” or “separateness,” as a social policy that embodied the racial tensions and subsequent subjugation of South African indigenous people by European settlers. In his pamphlet, “Apartheid: South Africa's Answer to a Major Problem,” Malan outlines the basic tenants of political apartheid and also states, “I must ask you to give White South Africans credit...they are normal human beings. They are a small nation, grappling with one of the most difficult problems in the world. To them millions of semi-barbarous Blacks look for guidance, justice and the Christian way of life” (Malan 7). To solve this problem, on what Malan deemed was a mission from God, the governing National Party, acting for the white population of South Africa representing less than 17% of the whole, created a “legal entrenchment of white privilege and racial domination;” additionally, apartheid “sought to reconstruct South African society solely on the basis of race

distinctions” (Halisi and O’Meara 295). Apartheid law codified and perpetuated a nation that functioned daily through gross human rights violations.

The Dutch arrived in South Africa in 1652, with the intention of establishing a trading post to receive supplies from the Khoikhoi and San people. Historian Robert Ross points out that the colonization of South Africa began when Dutch settlers from the trading post began to expropriate Khoikhoi and San territories by force; additionally, he reveals the slow erosion of indigenous culture during the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the reactions of clan leaders. Ross asserts that San leader Koerikei stated, “What are you doing in my land? You have taken all the places where the eland and other game live. Why did you not stay where the sun goes down, where you came from?” (Ross 23). During the 1700’s, in addition to land seizure, the Cape government, essentially the Dutch East India Company, also formalized “genocidal practice” (23); in 1795, the Cape was conquered by the British, and for more than a century, the Xhosa and other indigenous people were caught in the middle of a battle between European colonizers. In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, Desmond Tutu stated,

It was not the supporters of apartheid who gave this country the 1913 Land Act which ensured that the indigenous people of South Africa would effectively become hewers of wood and drawers of water for those with superior gun power from overseas. 1948 merely saw the beginning of a refinement and intensifying of repression, injustice and exploitation. It was not the upholders of apartheid who introduced gross violations of human rights in this land. (1.1.65)

When apartheid was first initiated, individuals were deemed as “black” or “colored” under the Population Registration Act of 1950, and were also legally prohibited

from participating in a sexual relationship with a white individual after the Immorality Act of 1950; additionally, the Group Areas Act of 1950 called for physical separation between races, which led to the eviction and forced removal of millions of black South Africans from designated white areas. By 1960, black South Africans, who numbered over 80% of the population, were able to own only 13% of the land (Halisi and O'Meara 294-6). Apartheid subjugated individuals on all levels, removing from the Xhosa and Zulu peoples a connection to their homelands, and the basic elements needed for existence. Nobel Peace Prize winner, and the first black South African Anglican Archbishop, Desmond Tutu, describes the effects of apartheid on black South Africans in *No Future without Forgiveness*:

[They] had borne the burden and the heat of repression, the little people whom apartheid had turned into the anonymous ones, faceless, voiceless, counting for nothing in their motherland, whose noses had been rubbed daily in the dust. They had been created in the image of God but their dignity had been callously trodden underfoot daily by apartheid's minions ... just because of an accident of birth, a biological irrelevance, the color of their skin. (6)

While the laws and legal organization of apartheid began to be abolished in 1990, South Africa remained a nation of, as Tutu describes, "faceless" and "voiceless" individuals.

Early in the process of the collapse of apartheid, The National Executive Committee of the ANC called for the new parliament to "set up, without delay, a Commission of Inquiry or Truth Commission into all violations of human rights since 1948" (Verdoolaege 7). In May of 1994, the newly appointed Minister of Justice announced parliament's decision to conduct a truth and reconciliation commission to

examine South Africa's years under apartheid. In July of 1995, after nearly a year of seeking agreement between parliament and political parties, The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 34 called into existence, and provided the framework for, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (8). The Act as signed into law by Mandela, states that the TRC works with the new constitution (1993) and

Provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex. (July, 26 1995)

Under the law, the TRC consisted of three subcommittees to develop democracy and to recognize human rights of all South Africans: The Human Rights Violations Committee, The Amnesty Committee, and the Committee of Reparation and Rehabilitation. The TRC officially began in December 1995, and was initially allocated eighteen months to complete the hearings (Verdoolaege 10); however, eighteen months turned into six years as the TRC conducted 140 hearings in sixty-one towns. Additionally, "22,000 statements were taken covering 37,000 violations, and 7,000 perpetrators applied for amnesty" (Graybill 8). In attempting to develop a complete picture of apartheid the TRC sought to "restore to victims their human and civil dignity by letting them tell their stories and recommending how they could be assisted; and to consider granting amnesty to those perpetrators who carried out their abuses for political reasons, and who gave full accountings of their actions to the commissions" (Graybill 6).

Desmond Tutu, appointed as Chairman of the commission, was influential in shaping the commission to seek forgiveness over punishment. Many historians have suggested that “as Desmond Tutu envisioned the workings of [the TRC], perpetrators would confess their sins and victims would offer their forgiveness” (39). While the TRC’s unprecedented hearings were not as clear-cut as Tutu’s idealistic visualization, the act of confessing became a critical element throughout the six-year commission. Andre Du Toit states that the confessions of apartheid events were important not only because they provided the TRC with first-hand accounts, but also because the act of vocalizing gave individuals the right to frame stories and be “recognized as legitimate sources of truth with claims to rights and justice. The relevant sense of truth is of a more *holistic narrative truth* – that involved in the overall framing of the events and experiences that together make up the victim’s own ‘story’” (136). Of the nearly 350 staff commissioners of the TRC, 1/3 had foundations in the mental health profession; additionally, psychologists suggest that victims need to “relive the past in order to come to terms with it. They have insisted on the benefit of speaking out. Repressing painful memories results in stress, anxiety, and depression, while sharing stories in a supportive setting leads to healing. Storytelling can allow victims to reshape the traumatic events and reintegrate it into the matrix of their lives” (Graybill164). While the psychological benefits of the TRC’s confessions can be seen through personal healing of the victim, the collaboration of the many individual narratives within the TRC can also represent a rewriting of the national narrative.

The rewriting of apartheid, and the narrative history of South Africa, can be examined through the development and manipulation of time. Because the TRC deals

with events that occurred over 45 years, the primary movement is retrospective, which breaks from the traditional, linear time progression that would require the commission to look only at the present and the future. Linear time would require South Africa to focus on punishment; instead, as Tutu suggests, by functioning in a more cyclical time pattern and returning to the past, forgiveness and healing can occur. Charles Maier answers the question of why the TRC's primary type of information was presented in narrative. He states, "because both history and the trial are based on a highly ordered recitation of reports that make sense of 'events' by placing them in a sequence structured by time" (271). The stories of the victims, and the perpetrators, create a new South African timeline that replaces the established narrative of the culture of power.

The TRC Report, issued in 1999, suggested how the commission talks back to South Africa's history of colonization. The Report states,

The purpose was to place in historical context what happened in Southern Africa in the period 1960-94. In a continental context, this represented the last great chapter in the struggle for African decolonization. In a South Africa-specific context, it was the climatic phase of a conflict that dated back to the mid-seventeenth century, when European settler first sought to establish a permanent presence on the subcontinent. (1:25)

In rewriting the national history, Andre Du Toit states that the TRC is backwards looking because it is a "historical founding project" (125). However, because the TRC functions in the past, it is a catalyst for the future. Martha Minow suggests that "by confronting the past, traumatized individuals can learn to discriminate between past, present, and future.

When the work of knowing and telling the story comes to an end, the trauma then belongs to the past; the survivor can face the work of building a future” (244).

The time of the TRC mirrors the African, specifically the South African indigenous Xhosa, concept of the passage of time, which varies from the linear western movement. Within the western perception of the passage of time, time moves from the past, the present, to the future. In contrast, Xhosa time comprises “events which have occurred, those which are taking place now, and those which are immediately to occur...actual time is therefore what is present and what is past” (Mbiti 34). Unlike western time, there is no forward progress in time. Instead of looking to the future for promised events, the Xhosa people of South Africa focus primarily on what has already taken place. Jennifer Wenzel states that “by providing a sanctioned (perhaps even sanctified) forum for harrowing testimony about human rights violations from perpetrators, victims, and their survivors, the TRC demonstrated that these events do not belong only to the past; they have afterlives” (22).

In essence the past examined by the TRC makes the future of a new South Africa possible, and develops a revised social memory for South Africa. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in his *The Social Frameworks of Memory* states, “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (38). The TRC served as a springboard for these memories to be both remembered and accepted as truth. Martha Minow suggests that one of the primary concerns of the TRC was to “honor and attend to in public the process of remembering” (251). Halbwach’s view of memory states that, “group membership” – in this case membership in the post-apartheid South Africa nation – “provides the materials for

memory and prods the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Groups can even produce memories in individuals of events that they never experienced in any direct sense” (Olick 19). The TRC was more concerned with developing a collective memory than bringing forth history, because individuals no longer have an “organic connection” to the past; however, “collective memory is the active past that forms our identities” (111).

While the TRC hearings involved individual stories and testimonies, because the hearings were broadcasted through television and radio across South Africa, the TRC made steps to unite the nation by making the memories of apartheid available to the majority of the population. Broadcasting on television and radio “enabled the audience to share in the process of acknowledgement, mourning, and sympathetic listening” (Minow 248). In discussing print capitalism and the creating of modern imagined communities, Benedict Anderson shows how the newspaper served as a connecting point between individuals who each read the paper in the mornings. These individuals are connected within an imagined community. He states that “the single most important emblem on [the paper], provides the essential connection – the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time. Within that time, ‘the world’ ambles sturdily ahead” (33). Paul James agrees with Anderson that a nation is a community of strangers “moving simultaneously through time which people fill with their own history. The connection between past, present and future can be provided by something as apparently banal as the date which heads a newspaper” (6). Like Anderson’s newspaper, the TRC’s television and radio broadcastings serve as a connector between individuals throughout South Africa. Besides providing South Africans a connection to the social memory of apartheid, the live airings

of the hearings also connected complete strangers at the same time across the nation. Throughout, the commission hearings were broadcasted live on the radio, and weekly television recapped every Sunday evening *TRC Special Report*. Viewership was unprecedented; moreover, in the first year, the *TRC Special Report* averaged 1.2 million viewers each week, and research reveals that in the final years, the TRC weekly recap topped ratings on all TV channels across South Africa (Sarkar 235). While the television and radio broadcasts' effects did not leave South Africa completely united and fully embodying Desmond Tutu's metaphorical imagining of a "rainbow people of God," they did create among the South African people a tangible connection where before, all connection had been severed through years of atrocity; moreover, the *TRC Special Report* developed viewers across the land in a form an imagined community, and a new form of nationalism.

The TRC served as a transition point in South African society, in an attempt to create a new national narrative time by reconciling the brutalities of the apartheid past, in order to move to the future; additionally, the TRC forever changed South African literature. Prior to the TRC and the fall of apartheid, an entire generation of South African writers were primarily concerned with "the injustice and destructiveness of apartheid" and the mode of writing was almost exclusively one of "protest, resistance...to expose [apartheid's] evil and to help – in whatever way literature can – to bring about its downfall" (Foley 126). However, with the accomplishment of this goal, many writers found themselves without subject matter or reason to write. Foley states that following the TRC, new South African Literature became centered on the twin motifs of truth and reconciliation, and many writers reveal "how much has been achieved in the process of

national healing and conciliation, but also, more importantly, just how much more remains to be done” (139, 140). Shane Graham describes literature following the TRC: “it exhibits a collective sense of loss, mourning, and elegy, as well as a sense of disorientation amid rapid changes in the physical and social landscape. These changes necessitate new forms of literal and figurative ‘mapping’ of space, place, and memory” (1-2). Much like the TRC hearings themselves, the literature following also serves as a tool to connect South Africans in a form of an imagined community. Post-TRC writers speak to the collective memory, and continue the work of the commission in rewriting the national narrative and developing a new past. David Attwell states that literature after apartheid focuses on the “political ambiguities of transition: the tension between memory and amnesia. It emphasizes the imperative of breaking silences necessitated by long years of struggle, the refashioning of identities caught between stasis and change, and the role of culture--or representation--in limiting or enabling new forms of understanding” (3). Sindiwe Magona and Zakes Mda are two Xhosa authors who continue the work of the TRC and redefine the memory of South Africans by examining the past through the Xhosa concept of time.

Magona’s *Mother to Mother* and Mda’s *Heart of Redness* are both concerned with the role of history within modern South African identity. In *Mother to Mother*, Magona provides a fictionalized account of the murder of Fulbright Scholar Amy Beihl; however, more than simply telling the events of the 1993 killing, Magona delves into the collective South African memory and provides an account of one of Beihl’s killers, Mxolisi, and his mother Mandisa. The novel is told from Mandisa’s perspective and mirrors the act of confession in the TRC. In an interview, Magona states that when Beihl’s murder took

place in 1993, she felt saddened but detached; however, when she went home and found out that she grew up with one of the killer's mothers, she was "catapulted into a situation where [she] had empathy" (283). In many ways she was brought back into the collective memory of South Africa. She states of Mandisa: "We grew up together! As we say in the township, 'I know her saliva!' because I have eaten candy from her mouth. I was horrified . . . I thought of the little Mandisa--how was she handling this?" (283). Magona goes on to state that she models her representation of Mandisa "using [her] experience and the experiences of women that [she] knew in the township" (283). *Mother to Mother* paints a picture of the brutality under apartheid, gives voice, and provides history to a character who, prior to the TRC, would remain unheard.

In the same way, Mda's *Heart of Redness* provides a history of the brutality under apartheid, and before when South Africa remains a colonial conquest. In the novel, Mda tells the story of Camugu, recently educated in the U.S. and returning to South Africa under the new democracy. Camugu must find his place amid tradition and modernity in post-apartheid South Africa by examining history; additionally, in looking to the past, Mda tells the story of 19<sup>th</sup> century brothers, Twin and Twin-Twin, and their actions during the Xhosa Cattle Killing of 1856-1857. When speaking about this novel, Mda states, "I researched the history because this now was going to be a history novel—although a different kind of history novel—I look at the history, but I also look at the present, the post-apartheid South Africa, to see the effects of that history on the present people. You see that? Half of the novel is about contemporary South Africa" (74). Truth and reconciliation can be seen in Mda's statement, because by bringing the past to the present, he mirrors and even extends the action of the TRC.

The TRC was appointed to manage testimonies from events occurring between 1960 and 1994. In the TRC Report Tutu states,

It is this contemporary history - which began in 1960 when the Sharpsville disaster took place and ended with the wonderful inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first democratically-elected President of the Republic of South Africa - it is this history with which we have had to come to terms. We could not pretend it did not happen. Everyone agrees that South Africans must deal with that history and its legacy. (1.1.2)

While the seemingly arbitrary date of 1960 finds connection to the Sharpsville Massacre, in which 67 people died and aroused negative international attention, October 1960 also marks the transition of South Africa from a British Commonwealth to an independent republic. With this in mind, the TRC does not deal with the actual time or direct history of colonization when South Africa was under direct control by European counties.

Contrastingly, Mda speaks reconciliation beyond the parameters of apartheid by drawing in the history of the Xhosa in the nineteenth century. In drawing together the colonial past with the present, Mda and Magona suggest that in order to see true reconciliation, all truth must be revealed; additionally both authors break the linear time constraints of the TRC itself.

Like the TRC, which reexamined time and rewrote the national narrative, Magona and Mda also manipulate and utilize specific elements of time within their novels, to speak reconciliation. In presenting a new definition of being South African, and providing a voice to the voiceless, Magona contrasts elements of western and African time concepts to reveal the validity of Xhosa time, and to discredit years of psychological

and sociological oppression of the South African people under colonization and apartheid. Magona and Mda both blur the line between past and present as they tell stories from various points of the past, much like the TRC. Additionally, Mda reveals the role of cultural memory within the actions and memories of his characters, and how the time of the past develops the time of the future.

Central to both novels' discussions of time is Magona and Mda's inclusion of the Xhosa Cattle Killings of 1856-1857. During this time, a young Xhosa prophetess, Nongqawuse, stated that if the Xhosa destroyed their crops and killed their cattle, then the sun would reset, and the ancestors would rise and rid the Xhosa from colonization. While the cattle killing is a historical event, Magona and Mda do not simply tell the event in historic time; instead, they speak of the cattle killing through mythic African time that legitimizes the actions of the Xhosa, and speaks to the national memory of the people. Mda states that he used "written history as it exists in books and in the archives, but also history as it exists in the imagination of the people, the oral history, which has a lot of magic because though it has some elements of the written history, a lot of it is legend" (74). An understanding of the Xhosa concept of time is critical in understanding the dynamics of the Cattle Killing and prophecy.

The fundamental unit of Xhosa time descriptions is based on the movement of the sun. In his research concerning the history of the Xhosa, J. B. Peires states that time was measured seasonally by the Xhosa in relation with the agricultural and cattle cycles. The year began with the starting of the plough season, iSilimela or June in Western time, and the Xhosa year ended with the harvest, uCanzibe (Peires 7). Peires is quick to point out that for the Xhosa the time of the past is not measured in units such as years or decades,

but instead, past time is measured by important events and milestones within the life of the community (8). John Mbiti states, “the day, the month, the year of one’s life time or human history, are all divided up or reckoned according to their specific events, for it is these that make them meaningful” (24). In addition to the units of measurement, the African, and specifically the Xhosa, concept of the past, and the movement of time, varies from the linear western movement. As seen with the TRC, the Xhosa concept of time involves looking to the past not the future. Along these same lines, for the Xhosa there is no concept of history moving forward to a “future climax,” such as the Christian apocalypse or other forms of western teleology (Mbiti 47).

Another aspect of Xhosa time comes into play with regards to the interactions of the ancestors. In many ways, because the ancestors are still active in the present, the past is not complete. Instead of a linear timeline, the Xhosa timeline is one that appears to fold over on top of itself allowing two times to interact. John Lamphear and Toyin Falola refer to the influence of ancestors on the African ontology and time consciousness as “a cyclical notion of time in which alternate generations are seen to replace one another quite literally” (Martin, O’Meara 76). If the past mediates within the time of the present, then the past should still be considered viable and active. Jennifer Wenzel suggests that the parallel times of past and present, during “which ancestors intervene in the present implies a notion of social time and memory in which the past can never really be complete” (Wenzel 183).

While many of the firsthand accounts of the Cattle Killing read like myths or fictional stories, it is important to realize that within the 13 months of the slaughter, it is estimated that 400,000 cattle were killed, over 40,000 Xhosa died of starvation, the

majority of the remaining Xhosa lands were seized by the British (Peires 43). Many modern South Africans believe the Cattle Killing event was a plot by Governor Grey, stating that British soldiers planted the prophecy to Nongqawuse, instead of the ancestral spirits as she had claimed. While many over the years have questioned why a whole people would believe the prophecy of a young girl and destroy their livelihoods, Peires points out that Nongqawuse's prophecy encompassed positive expectations founded in the Xhosa concept of time. The prophecy stated that if the conditions were met, "the whole nation would rise from the dead" (52). Peires goes on to point out that the Xhosa word for "rise" *vuka*, translates directly to mean "to get up in the morning" (52). For the Xhosa, the ancestors from the past were still active and alive in the present. In many ways the past and the present occurred simultaneously. Along these same lines, the Cattle Killing prophecy speaks of renewal or *thwasa*, which in Xhosa also represents seasonal changes such as a new moon or new buds or grass. Peires states, "The Xhosa idea of newness is rooted in their perception of the cyclical recurrence of natural phenomena and, ultimately, the cyclical nature of time itself" (54). Nongqawuse, in her prophecy, speaks of going full circle to the beginning of time, and re-enacting the first creation—creating a new Xhosa people without the influence of colonization. In many ways, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reflects the time concepts of Nongqawuse and the Xhosa. The TRC, speaking the prophecies of confession, sought to reconstruct time, to remove as much as possible the effects of apartheid from the South African people; essentially, creating a new nation.

The next chapter, "'The Difference of One Sun's Rise' – Conflicting time in *Mother to Mother*" explores various time concepts within the novel, and explores Mandisa's act of confession which is similar to the testimonies of the TRC. In her work,

Magona portrays the internal conflict between standardized, Western time and the so-called primitive time of the African other; furthermore, the two clashing times exemplify the incompatibilities of Western ideologies being forced on other cultures through colonization. This chapter will further explore the various images and rhetorical devices Magona utilizes to juxtapose linear time, which is based on science and technology, with cyclical time based on seasons and the travel of the sun.

Building on Magona's application of time, the third chapter, "'The Past. It Did Not Happen' – Ritual Memory Time in *Heart of Redness*", explores Mda's development of the Xhosa concept of the past and memory through his merging of the Cattle Killing of 1856-67 and present day South Africa. Furthermore, the chapter will explore Mda's interpretation of the passage of time and the interplay between the past and the present in relation to the Xhosa past and present ontology, as well as, the importance of the ritual acts of remembering and forgetting. By presenting the creation of a social memory developing out of mythic time, Mda points to the creation of a new South African national identity.

The concluding chapter, "'Perhaps Not Yet' – Reconciliation in *Mother to Mother* and *Heart of Redness* and the Development of Post-Apartheid South Africa", focuses on how Magona and Mda represent post-apartheid writers in speaking reconciliation and truth through their novels. Additionally, this chapter examines the ways in which Mda and Magona utilize Xhosa traditions and beliefs concerning time to develop a new imagined community for post-apartheid South Africa, which finds foundation in the past.

By including the Cattle Killing history, and by presenting the prophecy as still possible and not yet complete, Mda and Magona legitimize the Xhosa concept of time and Nongawuse's prophacy; furthermore, they speak the prophecy and the regeneration of cyclical time back into the cultural memory of post-apartheid South Africa. The TRC, the Xhosa Cattle Killings, Magona's *Mother to Mother*, and Mda's *Heart of Redness* are all connected by the Xhosa concept of the past and the concept of the movement of history. When examined together with the TRC and the cosmology of the Cattle Killing, Magona and Mda, through their use and inclusion of time, speak reconciliation and truth to a new South African nation.

## CHAPTER 2:

“THE DIFFERENCE OF ONE SUN’S RISE” –  
CONFLICTING TIME IN SINDIWE MAGONA’S *MOTHER TO MOTHER*

*“This Constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex. The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society... With this Constitution and these commitments we, the people of South Africa, open a new chapter in the history of our country.”*

*~ TRC Report 6.1.1, The Legal Basis of the Amnesty Process*

In his 1912 work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* sociologist Emile Durkheim states, “If men...did not have the same conception of time...all contact between their minds would be impossible, and with that, all life together” (30). If, as Durkheim suggests, a standardized, unvarying concept of time is necessary for an effective civilization, then it can also be asserted that societies with varying perceptions of time will naturally be in intellectual conflict. This specific time-based social struggle and form of colonization is explored in Sindiwe Magona’s novel *Mother to Mother*, which delves into the cultural differences resulting from colonization in South Africa.

Both standardized and Xhosa time plays an important role in *Mother to Mother*; and through elements of the story, including the description of the Cattle Killing and chapter titles, Magona legitimizes both concepts of time. However, through her narration, Magona attempts to break from the confines of Western time and implement a time-based structure that is cyclical and non-linear. Time in traditional Western texts, particularly in

the English novel, is traditionally linear and fundamentally one-directional. This linearity is due to constraints of written language, because meaning is derived from reading letter after letter, word after word, sentence after sentence, and so on. There are many techniques that modern authors utilize to liberate narrative from the constraints of linear time, many of which Magona incorporates into *Mother to Mother*; however, in her work on narrative structures, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan states that “the liberation is never complete because a complete one, if possible, will destroy intelligibility” (46). Magona breaks free from text-time and creates a story-time that uniquely emphasizes and mirrors, in many ways, the African time concept.

Magona’s fictionalization of Amy Biehl’s story possesses unique connections to the TRC. Biehl was murdered August 25, 1993, and in 1999 the four young men convicted of her murder faced the TRC in an appeal for amnesty. This specific trial was highly publicized, and broadcasted through the weekly television reports. As seen previously, this type of hearing broadcasts connected individuals throughout South Africa, and linked the community together through Biehl and the four men seeking amnesty. In the TRC report, Tutu states,

By telling their stories, both victims and perpetrators gave meaning to the multilayered experiences of the South African story. These personal truths were communicated to the broader public by the media. ... The stories told to the Commission were not presented as arguments or claims in a court of law. Rather, they provided unique insights into the pain of South Africa’s past, often touching the hearts of all that heard them. (1.5.36)

The four men, including Ntobeko Peni, told their personal history in South Africa. Peni stated, “Our killing of Amy Biehl had everything to do with politics – the unrest at the time and international attention helped bring South Africa to where we are today” (Graybill 71). Amnesty was granted for all four men convicted in Biehl’s murder; essentially, this action rewrote the history of the murder. In retelling the story of one of Biehl’s murderer and her murder, Magona draws from a story that had already situated itself in the collective unconscious of the South African people. With this foundation, Magona is able to build on the connection and speak concerning the deeper struggle against colonization; moreover, this struggle is evident through her use of time.

Before examining the text of *Mother to Mother*, it is important to explore first the significance and meaning behind the basic elements of western time and the time of the other. Western society tends to see time pass in a linear and irreversible model. This concept is first explored by the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus in early Western history. He states, “You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet other waters go ever flowing on” (cited in Rimmon-Kenan 46). Over the years, the idea of linearity has progressed and has developed through several defining structures. Before standardized time in the West, events were given time references in relation to personal experiences: for example, specific events were given references such as “when our child was born,” and timed intervals were given labels such as, “the length of the harvest.” With the development of the Gregorian calendar in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, western culture began to use intervals such as dates and months as temporal time references, and moved away from the more subjective, personal referencing to a more universal practice. However, it was not until the development of clock time that Western culture was given

the ability to break down time into smaller units, which sociologists have suggested played a leading role in creating an environment feasible for social interaction, and uniting the Western world (Zerubavel 4).

Clocks are an important element of standardized Western time and the development and social ramifications of the clock reveal the scientific and technological base of linear time. In fact, clock time has become such an integral part of Western society, that several historians, including E. P. Thompson, have deemed it both a “currency” and a “religion” (Thompson 90).

In 1780, Geneva first began to use “mean time” to track the pattern of the sun and set standards for time down to the minute; however, universal standardization came about in 1880 with the establishment of Greenwich Mean Time as the official time of Great Britain (Zerubavel 5). Greenwich Standardized Time was first established to aid in the communication and industrial revolutions in Britain with the scheduling of mail delivery, train travel, and telegraphs. The idea of and need for standardized time traveled throughout the Western world, and in 1884, Western world leaders met for the International Meridian Conference to develop an international standard of time.

Interestingly enough, while the conference revolved around establishing a set global time, only Western nations were given part in the proceedings. Ironically, the report from the conference reveals Western nations calling for “the common good of mankind,” and appealed to all delegates to be “citizens of the world,” even though numerous cultures and countries were not adequately represented (Zerubavel 19). From this point on, regardless of the established time patterns of individual societies, time was viewed through the lens of the Western standardized Greenwich Mean Time. Even in the

20<sup>th</sup> Century, in his “The Khomeini Enigma,” Ayatollah Khomeini made the following statement: “The heads of our [Muslim] countries are so influenced by the West that they have set their clocks according to European time. It's a nightmare” (19). In many ways, the institution of standardized time on nonwestern nations can be seen as an act of psychological oppression. Standard time eliminated an important and defining characteristic of many societies and deemed the way of life, in the nonwestern world, primitive and incapable of being considered “citizens of the world” without first modifying their time consciousness.

Based on the standardization of time, the actual clock also plays an important role in the time consciousness of the West. The pendulum clock developed by Dutch mathematician Christian Huygens allowed men to access accurate time throughout the day, and not be limited to identifying time in relation to the movement of the sun, tides, and other natural events (Adjaye 201). Technology historian Lewis Mumford, in his early work, *Technics and Civilization*, states,

The clock is not merely a means of keeping track of the hours, but of synchronizing the actions of men. The clock, not the steam-engine, is the key-machine of the modern industrial age...in its relationship to determinable quantities of energy, to standardization, to automatic action, and finally to its own special product, accurate timing, the clock has been the foremost machine in modern technics; and at each period it has remained in the lead: it marks a perfection towards what other machines aspire. (14)

Mumford goes on to point out that the clock “dissociated time from human events” (15). The scientific base marked a transition from nature to socially founded time, because, as

Eviatar Zerubavel asserts, clocks are no longer set by the sun, but by the time of the Greenwich observatory. What is more, the time that now dominates the West and the rest of the world actually has some discrepancy with actually solar time as a result of the time zone divisions, and it could be argued that the scientific time of the West is less accurate than time based solely on nature and the sun (Zerubavel 19).

Standard time appears in several places throughout *Mother to Mother*. In the novel, Magona weaves together two parallel stories: the story of her son's violent crime and subsequent death of Fulbright Scholar Amy Biehl, and the story of oppression in South Africa under apartheid. While standard time is used in various places in the novel's structure and specific ideas, Magona only develops two specific images of standard time in the form of clocks. The first image occurs early in the novel as Magona attempts to recreate Amy Biehl's morning routine the day that she died. She states, "She slides in behind the wheel and her eyes automatically leap to her wrist. The big round watch that looks like a man's tells her: seven fifty-five" (6). This description illustrates the prevalence of standardized time in the Western culture. Amy's eyes "automatically leap" to see the time, and Magona seems to suggest that this involuntary action is an ingrained habit from her Western culture. It is also interesting to note that Magona develops the image of the watch to be masculine. By developing the watch to "look like a man's" Magona relates the concept of standardized time with patriarchal society.

The second image of the clock occurs at the beginning of chapter six. As Mandisa is lying awake wondering where her son is and his involvement in the murder earlier that day, she states, "the shiny green arms of the alarm clock next to the bed say it is half-past three. Long before my wake-up time" (79). In many ways this clock images seems

foreign to the story. The descriptive words “shiny” and “green” seem out of place when compared to the surrounding imagery of the narrative. Throughout the novel, the descriptions mainly present images that are grey, muted, and decaying; however, this image seems to be from another setting. Having the clock present, Magona is revealing the fact that standardized time is not a natural element of the society.

Interestingly, the chapter title, given directly before the image of the clock, states that the time is “4 am”. In other places where the chapter gives the time, it is broken down to five minute intervals to preserve the truth of the events. There is a discrepancy between the two times, even though standardized time is present in the form of the clock. Through this image, Magona questions the validity of what is considered the “true” precision of Western time. In this scene, the two times are juxtaposed, yet both occur simultaneously; Magona does not qualify either, but simply suggests that there is no absolute time.

In contrast to Western time, “African” time is based not on science and mechanical devices, but on traditions embedded in the society and the cycle of the sun. Because each clan has its own individual traditions, work patterns, and rituals, at the time of standardization, there were various concepts of time throughout the continent and no unifying time calendar. The elements that make up the African concept of time are diverse and extensive and are rooted in every level of society, including

life cycles; occupational calendars observed by farmers, fishermen and other workers; ritual cylindrical systems in which there are definite patterns of days set aside for performing specific rituals of state; annual festivals that mark the commencement of the local year rather than the arbitrary January first; myths,

legends and genealogies that embody temporal constructs; various indigenous mechanisms and strategies used to establish chronologies, etc. (Okoewho 200)

In many ways, the African concept of time is equally complex compared to the codified, linear Western time; moreover, E. P. Thompson describes African time, and the time outside of Western civilization, as based primarily on the pattern of work and domestic chores. This type of task orientation develops a system of time that is not fixed or standardized because, “Social intercourse and labor are intermingled - the working-day lengthens or contracts according to the task and there is no great sense of conflict between labor and ‘passing the time of day’” (Thompson 60). This task-oriented time can be seen in the time concept of the Nuer tribe in Africa. Evans-Pritchard, a social historian, studied the Nuer people: “The daily timepiece is the cattle clock, the round of pastoral tasks, and the time of day and the passage of time through a day are to a Nuer primarily the succession of these tasks and their relation to one another” (qtd. in Thompson 58). The concept of task oriented time, to the Western mind, appears to be wasteful and lazy, when in reality, a sense of time based on what needs to be done in relation to changes in nature can be more efficient with regards to social and labor actions.

Another key difference between African time and Western time is the influence between time and society. In the West, time dictates society, but in contrast, “Africans are active agents in the construction and interpretation of what time means to them” (Adjaye 220). Basically, time is a living element of various African culture: created and shaped directly by society.

Magona utilizes several images to reveal African time in the novel, and many of these images center on the sun in relationship to the day. For example, instead of referring to actual numerical times, characters often talk about moments of the day with regard to the position of the sun. When Mandisa leaves for work in the morning, she reflects on her day saying that she would be “coming back long after the sun has gone to sleep” (8), and later, when remembering the past, she states that her grandfather told her, “to go and play with my friends before Mama found me something to do or the sun went home to sleep” (178). The sun is personified to reveal the time of day. These two images also reveal the characters’ indifference towards scientific meaning, because instead of viewing the sun being orbited by the earth, the characters view the sun from their own perspective and on its own terms.

Unfortunately, many of the views that are available on the concept of African time are based on how African time compares to Western time, and there is very little work that shows how the African concept of time stands alone. Even if the works of Western historians are helpful in illuminating time in Africa, there are oftentimes biases that present African society as primitive and lacking. For example, although Evans-Pritchard did significant work outlining the time concept of the Nuer people, he concluded by saying, “It must be pointed out that, strictly speaking, the Nuer have no concept of time and, consequently, no developed abstract of time reckoning” (Qtd. in Adjaye 201). Even though he reveals the foundation of the Nuer’s time pattern, Evans-Pritchard cannot break from the stereotypical idea that societies without standardized time are primitive.

Evans-Pritchard's ideology is a result from the tradition of Lucien Levy-Bruhl, in which time was an element of mental activity that more primitive societies were incapable of achieving. Levy-Bruhl states,

We know, however, that primitives' minds do not represent time exactly as ours do. Primitives do not see, extending indefinitely in imagination, something like a straight line, always homogenous by nature, upon which events fall into position, a line on which foresight can arrange them in a uni-linear and irreversible series, and on which they must of necessity occur one after the other. To the primitive, time is not, as it is to us, a kind of intellectual intuition. (202)

While the assertions that Africans and other nonwestern cultures are incapable of time discourse are unfounded, Levy-Bruhl does bring up the accepted idea that African time is cyclical and nonlinear. Because African time is based more on social and natural institutions and not solely on accepted codification, there tends to be more of an influence of cycles and reoccurring patterns.

The conflict between Western time and the time of the non-Western other first appeared during colonization. As Europe colonized Africa and attempted to bring the native peoples under Western control, time played a crucial role as Africans were forced to conform to the standardized European workday. The conflict over workday time caused a fundamental clash between the Africans task-based time and the Western mechanical-based time. For example, Zulu workers in the south held a concept of a six month year based on crop cycles, and the workday lasting through what needed to be done; however, with high demand for crops, the Western colonialists implemented the Western idea of a twelve month year, and night work (Adjaye 2006). Native people, acting

in accordance to their natural concept of time, were deemed lazy and inferior by the West. In the commonly read British *Encyclopedia*, African people are described as “idolaters, superstitious, and live most filthily; they are lazy, drunken rascals, without thought for the future, insensitive to any happening” (cited in Appiah 22).

The conflict between Western time and African time can be seen throughout *Mother to Mother* in specific elements of the story, structure, and action. Standardized time is present throughout the story as chapter titles giving the time, date, and year of the events. Such as: “5.15pm- Wednesday 25 August 1993” (20), and “10.05 pm- Wednesday 25 August 1993” (67). In all, there are nine specific headings that present a standardized time reference. With regard to the storyline, Magona uses the full time and date heading for the chapters that start in the present; however, there is one time-based chapter title for a chapter set in the past, but the title simply gives the month and year and not the date and time: “Guguletu- September 1972” (98). Many critics have suggested that Postcolonial African writers create a re-enactment of history and traditions in writing, and African writers “seem to write the modern histories of Africa’s traditions as a series of events- as historical process” (Eze 25). The method of revealing the truth and speaking reconciliation relies on the ability of authors to develop realistic retellings that are founded in standardized time which gives the facts credence. Magona is telling the fictional account of a true event, so by using standardized time in correlation with her story, she legitimizes the events and gives the actions of her characters’ credibility.

In contrast with the inclusion of standardized time, to add in her authority and authenticity, Magona also develops mythic time in the novel that helps reveal the traditional side of African time and the beliefs about time that permeate the culture. Late

in the novel, during a flashback conversation between Mandisa and her grandfather, Magona presents mythic time and the role that it plays in the African tradition. Mandisa's grandfather tells the story of the Xhosa Cattle Killing. Magona could have easily told the story of the 1857 Cattle killing in terms of facts and figures of standard time; however, she chooses to present the story in the traditional manner including the mythic time. Instead of giving the precise dates of the incident, the Grandfather simply states, "long, long ago...in the times of our ancestors..." (174), allowing the true events to take on mythic qualities, to the point where the events cannot be given a specific time reference. Magona is like traditional mythic narrators, who attempt to invite the present-day audience "as witness to the timeless truth that he is trying to re-enact" (Okpewho 86).

Mythic time changes from culture to culture and from myth to myth; therefore, the model of mythic time is hard to isolate. In studying how cultural myths die, Sociologist Levi-Strauss, in his work *Structural Anthropologies*, presents mythic time as both encompassing the past and the future. He states that mythic history and time simultaneously travel down two paths, "retrospective, to forge a traditional order on a distant past; or prospective, to make this the beginning of a future which is starting to take shape" (Okpewho 54). Because myths are presented in an oral tradition, the time remains in constant flux, and cyclically modifies the past and the future time. The growth of a myth can be seen in *Mother to Mother*, as Mandisa states,

Like wild fire, it spread. From person to person it went; with each embellishing it, stamping it with detailed individual whims and fears. Like the rollings of the dung beetle, merely passing it along carried within itself the mechanism for its own

augmentation and it grew until to become the hoarse roar of a river greedily drinking down the first rains after a long, hard-hitting drought. (53)

In many ways, as a myth is passed from person to person and is changed and personalized, the mythic time transcends standardized Western time, because the time of story being retold remains in flux.

The Xhosa Cattle Killing revolves around the cyclical African concept of time and reveals the importance of the sun in the culture. The grandfather tells the story to expose the intense hatred that the Xhosa people have against their European oppressors, but in voicing the legend, he also unearths the basic differences and conflict between African time and standardized time of the West. He states,

Deep run the roots of hatred here  
 So deep, a cattle-worshipping nation killed all its precious herds.  
 Tillers, burned fertile fields, fully sowed, bearing rich promise too.  
 Readers of Nature's Signs, allowed themselves fallacious belief.  
 In red noon's eye rolling back to the east for sleep. (176)

Following a prophecy from a young girl, the Xhosa people killed their cattle and decimated their crops in the belief that the sun would rise to the highest point at noon, and then reset along the same path in the east. When this occurred, the oppressive colonizers would be gone and in essence time would restart at a point that predates colonization. This nonlinear movement of time contrasts the constancy of Western time, and reveals a deeper African belief in time reversal and the ability to rewrite the past. The facts of this story reveal the intense unbridled desperation of a people who are willing to do whatever it takes to free themselves from oppression; however, the Cattle Killing also

shows the very essence of the African time consciousness believed it possible for these events to occur: for time to undo itself and reverse the past.

Historically, the sun did not reset; the narrator states the myth, “Soon, soon, tragically soon, there could be no doubt however. The sun was progressing, as before” (178). Magona utilizes mythic time to tell the story of her people, in order to reclaim and preserve the African concept of time. By telling a true story, based on true facts and time, through a form of oral myth, Magona attempts to legitimize the oral, circular time tradition and attempt to find a balance between “traditional consciousness” of Africa, and the “modern sensibilities” imposed by the West (Okpewho 216).

The fundamental techniques used to create a difference between text-time and story-time are foreshadowing and flashback. Foreshadowing is simply the author hinting at and making preparation for future events, and flashback is often presented as a retrospect of a character to an event that occurred before narration began. Fundamentally though, foreshadowing and flashback do not change the actual time of the narration, but instead these devices can change the conscious time of an individual character and even the reader.

While Magona employs foreshadowing and flashbacks, she takes the development of her story time a step further by developing analepsis and prolepsis, which actually modify the narrative time of the story. Analepsis occurs when an early story event is told following later events, basically the narration returns to a past event (Rimmon-Kenan 48). Prolepsis is used to tell a story event before previous events have been mentioned, essentially, jumping the narrative time into the future (Rimmon-Kenan 48). Literary theorist Gérard Genette presents the techniques of analepsis and prolepsis in his work

“Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method.” Genette suggests that analepsis and prolepsis create a type of secondary and temporal narrative for a story that is overlaid on the primary, or first, narrative; therefore, the time of the first narrative continually circles back around through the past and future to the present (Rimmon-Kenan 49). Analepsis and prolepsis allow Magona to break successfully from linear time and create a circular time pattern.

The primary narrative of the novel is the story of August 25, 1993 and the events surrounding the murder of Amy Biehl by Mxolisi and a group of South African youth activists, and the response of his mother Mandisa. Analepsis is present in several places within the primary narrative, and the narrative time jumps to the past to retell the story of Mandisa and Mxolisi’s upbringings and the hardships under apartheid. For example, chapter five begins in the present as Mandisa talks to a neighbor Skonana, but soon the narrative time is abruptly transported to when Mandisa was a child and first moved to Guguletu. Within a few paragraphs, the story-time breaks the confines of linear time and utilizes the length nearly 20 pages to tell the details of the relocation of South African natives to townships. The two times are linked by the image of the tea kettle: in the present, “Come over, let me put the kettle on,” and the past, “Put the kettle on first, and run!” (48, 49). This connecting image makes the time transition smooth, as the new analepsis time overlays the first narrative time. The story-time returns to the present abruptly with the standardized time heading, “10.05PM-- Wednesday 25 August 1993” (67). A similar analepsis occurs at the transition from chapter 9 to chapter 10. Chapter 9 is in the time of the primary narration, and chapter 10 shifts back to when Mandisa is a child and hears the Cattle Killing story from her grandfather. Again, the time change in

the narration is done smoothly, but the narration returns to the present brusquely with the heading “1PM-- Thursday 26 August” (182).

The primary narration is also modified through Magona’s creation of prolepses. In the Western literary tradition, prolepses, shifting the narration to the future, are much less frequent than analepsis; additionally, the shift from the past modifies the question of suspense from “what will happen?” to “how is it going to happen, and why?” (Rimmon-Kenan 52). It can be argued that Magona actually begins the novel with a form of prolepses. Chapter 1, titled “Madisa’s Lament,” occurs outside of the primary narration and is in the form of a letter from Mandisa to the mother of Amy Biehl. The first sentence of the chapter, and the novel, is “My son killed your daughter. People look at me as though I did it. The generous ones as though I made him do it” (1). This statement takes away all question, all suspense, from the audience with regards as to the main action of the novel. From this point, Magona moves to the primary narration to explain the reasons behind the action. Throughout the rest of the novel, there are times where the narration is broken up and a section of the letter is inserted changing the time to the future, reminding the readers of the end result.

Along with analepsis and prolepsis, Magona also manipulates the duration of events endeavoring to liberate her narration from standardized time. Since many of the events are preceded by standardized time references, it is easy for readers to compare the duration of different events with regards to the duration of the story, minutes, hours, days, etc., with the duration of the text, sentences, paragraphs, pages, etc. (Rimmon-Kenan 55). A story-time following the Western ideals of standardization would naturally flow at a consistent speed or pace; in contrast, a narration in which the pace varies throughout the

work, is more in line with the African concept of time. In *Mother to Mother*, there is considerable difference in the duration of events in the past and present narrations. For example, chapter three, in which Mandisa is traveling home after hearing of the crime in Guguletu, has a time duration of approximately two hours, 5:15pm to 7:30pm, but also has a lengthy textual duration of 20 pages. Giving this much attention to such a short period of time allows Magona to delve into Mandisa's complex emotions during her ride home, and allows Mandisa to give very graphic descriptions about her surrounds. She states on her way to the bus, "I clutch my bag tight against my bosom. Hugged it as though it were a new-born babe. Or a lover newly returned from a long stint in the gold mines of Johannesburg. If, in the pandemonium, the bag should fall, I might as well kiss it goodbye" (25). This attention to detail and comparison is only possible because the duration of time has been decelerated (Rimmon-Kenan 55).

In contrast, the events that are told from the past, occur at a faster rate, and often months and years are covered in the length of one passage. When retelling Mxolisi's childhood, Mandisa accelerates time and covers years of his life in just a few sentences: "Mxolisi grew as though he were a sapling during a summer of bountiful rains. As fast as he shot up physically, other aspects of his development were even more spectacular. At two, he could say things in a way anyone could understand, not just his momma" (145). In this brief section, the duration of the events does not match the correlating duration of text. As the past narration becomes close to the present time, the duration reaches the maximum speed of ellipsis (omission), where zero textual space corresponds to some story duration (Rimmon-Kenan 55). The narration briefly reveals the events surrounding Mxolisi's struggle between whether or not to go to school or to work and support his

family, and then once again the narration shifts back to the present, leaving no information or description about the time in-between. By accelerating and decelerating the narration, Magona subverts standardized time, which has equal and set duration regardless of the conditions, and creates her own value system and relationship between time intervals.

The ending of the novel is possibly the most obvious moment where Magona calls into question the validity of Western standardized time. Instead of concluding the novel in standard time, as one would expect since the novel is based on true events, Magona once again returns to the mythic element of African time. The choice to use mythic time is particularly noteworthy because it is commonly asserted by sociologists, including Adjaye, that while mythic time possesses an underlying temporal consciousness of time, there are limitations with regards to historical accuracy. This is because mythic representations of time may be discontinuous and manipulated (Adjaye 209). Regardless, the narration returns to the mythic time elements of the Cattle Killing story.

If the first reference to the myth retelling of Cattle Killing is retrospective, as Levi-Strauss suggests, then the final reference to the myth is prospective and is used to shape the future (Okpewho 54). The final section of the novel includes the heading “Guguletu, late afternoon, Wednesday 25 August,” and contains a direct retelling of Amy and Mxolisi at the time of her death. Mandisa then states of her son, “We have been cheering him on since the day he was born. Before he was born. Long before” (209). This proclamation is similar to Mandisa’s grandfather’s first statement at the beginning the retelling of the Cattle Killing, “Long, long ago...” (174). Mandisa continues, “Nongqawuse saw it in that long, long-ago dream: a great raging whirlwind would come.

It would drive *abelungu* to the sea. Nongqawuse had but voiced the unconscious collective wish of the nation: rid ourselves of the scourge” (210). Just as Nongqawuse and the Xhosa people killed their livelihoods in the hope that their oppressors would be removed, so did Mxolisi murder Amy Biehl, crying “One Settler! One Bullet!” in the hopes of regaining control over their lives (205).

Magona manipulates time and develops a mythic time that inserts Mxolisi into the Nongqawuse myth and the story of the Cattle Killing. She goes on to draw a parallel between Mxolisi and Nongqawuse: both are an embodiment of their society’s values and desires, and yet both are rejected by the same society. Nongqawuse “had but voiced the unconscious collective wish of the nation,” just as Mxolisi enacted the “deep, dark, private yearnings of a subjugated race” (210).

Magona recalls the details of the Cattle Killing in the final sentence of the novel, presenting the established fruitless hope, that time can break from its linear path, and reverse itself. The novel ends, “but for the chance of a day, the difference of one sun’s rise, she would be alive today. My son, perhaps not a murderer. Perhaps, not yet” (210). *Mother to Mother* is based on true events, and the facts and times of Amy Biehl’s murder are documented and accepted as truth. By ending the novel in a direct reference to Nongqawuse’s prophecy, a direct reference to mythic time, Magona brings into question the validity of standard time. Furthermore, by fostering sympathy towards Mxolisi, Magona is able to reveal successfully reveal the hopefulness found in a circular concept of time.

Western and African concepts of time are present throughout Sindewi Magona’s *Mother to Mother*. While the Western view of time is linear and is founded in strict,

scientific representation, African time is more fluid and based of tradition and daily life. In many ways, Magona's treatment of time is parallel with Mda's narrative choices in *Heart of Redness*. Together both authors work together to validate the Xhosa time consciousness, and to speak reconciliation and truth to South African history. Magona's storyline and rhetorical devices that develop the novel present two times in conflict, which echo the conflict between the West and the other as a result of colonization. While in the novel, standardized time is presented as being valid, as in the case of the chapter titles and the Cattle Killing Myth, Magona is successful at molding and manipulating her narration to break the confines of linearity, leaving her readers questioning the validity of time itself.

## CHAPTER 3:

“THE PAST. IT DID NOT HAPPEN” –  
RITUAL MEMORY TIME IN *HEART OF REDNESS*

*“the past is knocking constantly on the doors of our perceptions, refusing to be forgotten, because it is deeply embedded in the present. To neglect it at this most crucial of movement’s in our history is to postpone the future.”*

~Njabulo Ndebele

Unlike Magona’s *Mother to Mother*, Mda’s *Heart of Redness* does not juxtapose Western and Xhosa time concepts; instead, Mda show how the Xhosa perceptions of past and present time are capable and valid to stand alone. In his work defining the intersections between history and postcolonial theory, Dipesh Chakrabarty states that “the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself” (109). He suggests that time multiplicity outside of traditional, linear time— or heterotemporality— must be recognized when examining “subaltern pasts” (109). Furthermore, nonwestern views concerning time orientation and consciousness, should be considered in conjunction with post-apartheid novels, including Magona’s *Mother to Mother* and Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*. While Magona introduces Xhosa time through specific instances of time images and identifications, such as the date stamp chapter headings and representations of various timepieces, Mda instead speaks to the passage of time, and the relation between the past and the present, within Xhosa cosmology and philosophy.

Like *Mother to Mother*, *Heart of Redness* does not develop as a conventional historiography bound chronologically, but instead Mda weaves together a portrait of

subaltern pasts as he presents the story of the Xhosa people during the historic Cattle Killing of 1856–1857, and the birth of the new democratic South Africa following the fall of apartheid in 1994. Mda blurs the story of the prophetess Nongqawuse’s prophecy to raise Xhosa ancestors to help fight the colonizers, with the story of returning South African exiles, represented by Camagu, the novel’s protagonist, after the fall of apartheid (Foley 130). The passage of time and the interplay between the past and the present develop as important characteristics of the novel that reveal both the Xhosa concept of time and the importance of ritual acts of remembering and forgetting. By presenting the creation of a social memory developing out of mythic time, Mda points to the creation of a new South African national identity.

The structure of Mda’s narrative mirrors the Xhosa concept of time and the flow between the past and the present. The novel is comprised of two distinct timelines that continually interact and switch the focus of the narrative. While the end of the novel presents a time that is fluid and shifts indiscernibly between the past and the present, early in the narrative the storyline and time shift suddenly, often being triggered by one word. This technique is similar to Magona’s technique of connecting the past and the present when she inserts a flashback in analeptic time. When Camagu first witness the memory ritual of the Unbelievers, alongside of NoPetticoat, the narrator says of the “wonderful spectacle of suffering:”

They are invoking grief by engaging in a memory ritual. In their trance they fleet back through the Middle Generations, and linger in the years when their forebears were hungry.

Hunger had seeped through the soil of the land of the amaXhosa. It also fouled the ill-gotten lands of the neighboring amaMfengue. (74)

Separated simply by a break on the page, the time transition is triggered by the words “hungry/hunger,” and develops a connected passage that begins in the present and ends in the past. This narrative time transition is not unique to Camagu’s witness of the ceremony; instead, a majority of the time transitions occur in a similar fashion throughout the novel and the audience is catapulted into a different time.

Oftentimes, the only indication of the shift is the repetition of an object, action, or emotion. For example, a flash-forward transition occurs later in the novel as Twin-Twin and Bhonco acknowledge their shared scars across time. The passage states,

“His [Twin-Twin] scars began to itch...the itching was so severe that he had to roll himself against a boulder.

Bhonco’s scars are playing up again. Whenever he is upset by the Believers the scars itch. (113)

The obvious connecting action and image in this passage is the itching scars that mar both characters. While this passage prompts a switch in the narrative time, Mda also connects the two characters in time, and suggests that the two events are occurring simultaneously, and that it is actually Twin-Twin’s scars that are appearing on Bhonco’s skin and causing him to remember.

Mda further develops the connection between the two narratives and places them within the same present time, by creating mirror characters that exist in both times and

periodically blur the boundary between the novel's past and present. As seen in the previous passage, Twin-Twin and Bhonco are connected through their lineage and supernatural scars that leave both men marked. The scars are the supernatural representation of the two men's anger towards traditionalism. Critic Renee Schatteman states, "In interweaving the two stories and the repeating character names and traits, Mda is going to great efforts to establish a reciprocal relationship between the present and the past in this novel" (277). This reciprocal relationship is revealed through the shared traits of Twin-Twin and Bhonco; additionally, Mda also shapes several other characters that in fact share the same name across time.

In the 1856 storyline, Qukezwa has a son Heitsi, and in the 1998 timeline there is a mirror character Qukezwa who also has a son Heitsi. The character of Heitsi is an important allusion to Xhosa mythology and the concept of history. The Xhosa people borrow many elements of the Khoikhoi's mythology, and an important figure in for the Khoikhoi is the character of Heitsi-eibib, a mythical ancestral hero who is often worshiped as the god of the hunt. There are various myths concerning Heitsi's birth and conception, his mother is traditionally thought to be a cow or a human woman; however, it is generally agreed on that "Heitsi-eibib, like countless other gods and heroes, is also said to have been the son of a virgin who tasted a particular plant, and so became pregnant" (Lang 136). Dale Bengtson retells the event:

On one occasion, young girls went out to fetch firewood, and one girl took a hobe-/g' (a kind of juicy sweetish grass,) chewed it, and swallowed the juice, and she was delivered of a son, who was very clever, and she called that boy Heitsi-

eibi. And all the other young women came and helped her to nurse the child and he soon became a big man. (17)

In addition to the virgin birth, Heitsi-eibi is said to have died and been reborn countless times throughout the Khoikhoi ancestral history; in essence, he is a character who is not limited by the constraints of traditional, western concepts of time, or the barriers between the past and present.

The virgin birth of Heitsi-eibi draws a direct parallel with Qukezwa's son Heitsi in *The Heart of Redness*; moreover, Camagu is quick to defend, "No one made that woman pregnant....the grandmothers confirmed after a thorough examination that she is still a virgin. I never had anything to do with her" (190). If the Xhosa time is folded, with the past and the present parallel, then Mda could be suggesting that Qukezwa's son Heitsi is the reincarnation of the mythic ancestor Heitsi-eibi. This allows Heitsi to be present at multiple times, in the distant past and the "now" of the Xhosa, simultaneously.

Along with Mda, Magona also develops a similar Heitsi-eibi character through Mxolisi. As Mandisa accounts her past, she asserts that she was a virgin when she conceived her son; moreover, when she is examined by the village like Qukezwa, the midwife announces, "*Utaketwe!* She has been jumped into!" (112). Meg Samuelson suggests that Magona fashions Mxolisi "as a Christ figure" (237). Mxolisi's connection to Heitsi-eibi is also reflected in Mandisa's accusation that "my virginity was rent not by a lover or husband, even. No, but by my son" (156). In traditional KhoiKhoi mythology, Heitsi-eibi is a trickster character and at time considered moral ambiguous; in fact, he is traditionally accused of the rape of his mother. Bengtson retells the event:

Once, on an occasion, the mother and other friends of hers were travelling. And her boy was very naughty and fretful, and his mother had to stop, while her friends were going on...in this way he went on, until the other women were out of sight. Then he suddenly became a big man, and forced his mother to the ground, and committed incest (Xai-si). After this he again became a baby. (17)

With the virgin birth along, Mxolisi's representation as a Christ character is apparent; however, when couple with the Oedipal action, Mxolisi, like Mda's Heitsi, clearly mirrors the KhoiKhoi Heitsi-eibi. As a Heitsi-eibi character, both Mxolisi and Heitsi are set up as character who will save the present Xhosa generation- the post-apartheid South Africa. In developing characters that mirror the ancient KhoiKhoi diety, Mda and Magona appeal to the Xhosa past to influence the present.

In *The Heart of Redness*, the two characters of Qukezwa, like Heitsi, blur the separation between the past and present time. Throughout the novel, both women are described sharing similar characteristics; specifically, the two characters each possess the ability for split-tone singing. Camagu refers to Qukezwa as "the guardian of a dying tradition," and this type of singing, also referred to as overtone, involves the singer singing two notes simultaneously (152). Qukezwa's aptitude as a split-tone singer mirrors Mda's split time narrative, and the heterotemporality of Xhosa time—the past and the present occurring simultaneously, or in other words, in harmony.

In the last paragraph of the novel, the distinction between the two time periods is ambiguous, and Mda fully blends the two Qukezwa characters and the son Heitsi: "Qukezwa sings in soft pastel colors and looks at Heitsi. Qukezwa swallows a mouthful of oysters and looks at Heitsi. Oh, this Heitsi! He is afraid of the sea" (277). Qukezwa's

split tone voice signals the combination of the narratives, and Johan Jacobs states, “the two stories blend into a seamless narrative of the past and the present, and the two voices combine into a single, split-tone song” (Jacobs 236). Qukezwa’s character serves as a prophetess of sorts unifying the two times; furthermore, Dirk Klopper points out that the Xhosa word *Qukezwa*, means “the person elected to bring the community together, to facilitate social integration” (101). In her role as a diviner or prophetess, Qukezwa inhabits the past and the present, and she is “witness, as it were, to the prophetic voice” (102). This prophet voice to the Xhosa transcends time, and in Xhosa the word for diviner, *igqirha*, is derived from the word for healer (Hammond-Tooke 279), which is seen in Qukezwa’s ability to reconcile the two times of the novel.

Hammond-Tooke presents the Xhosa action of prophecy and divination in contrast with other South African peoples such as the Nguni, whose prophetic rituals rely on technical expertise and a physical ceremony involving dance and the practice of casting bones. In contrast, the Xhosa people trace their divination to the KhoiKhoi, and participate in the act of prophecy in an intuitive manner of “tuning in” to the promptings of the ancestors (278). This “tuning in” to an internal truth can be compared to the Xhosa act of collective remembering, or drawing from the collective unconscious.

Like diviners or prophets, the Xhosa ancestors also connect the past and the present; Jennifer Wenzel suggests that the parallel narratives of the past and the present “which ancestors intervene in the present implies a notion of social time and memory in which the past can never really be complete” (183). The anticipation and belief of the interaction between the past ancestors on the present can be seen in several instances within *Heart of Redness*. When Zim becomes ill, his daughter Qukezwa attempts to keep

him in the present time by connecting her father to the past. A woman suffering from what was diagnosed as cervical cancer, NomaRussia, arrives asking that Zim carry a message to his wife in the Otherworld. NomaRussia states,

This is the last appeal I can make to NoEngland. I heard that Zim is in the process of dying and that you are holding him...perhaps he can take a message to NoEngland that she removes the curse. I have been to doctors of all sorts. Only NoEngland can stop the pain that is racking my body. (252)

Even from the past and beyond death, NoEngland is able to control NomaRussia, both physically, through the curse, and mentally by making NomaRussia dependent on her power. In the Xhosa tradition, death is considered to be the physical bridge between two realms. When someone dies, Mongameli Mabona asserts that the Xhosa say, “*ugodukile* (she/he has gone home)” or “*uye kweleminyanya* (she/he has gon to the world/abode of the ancestors)” (316). To the Xhosa, death is a point of transition and is not bound by time in the traditional Western sense.

When discussing an individual’s transition between the present and the past, Mbiti refers instead to the “now-point” and the “unlimited past” (28). He goes on to suggest that an individual remains in the “now point” of time, as long as his or her name is remembered. In essence, as long as the ancestor is remembered by name, then he or she remains in the “now point” of time, and can be considered in many ways, the living dead (33). Outside of the remembered past is “unlimited past” or *Zamani*, in Swahili culture, which “is the final storehouse for all phenomena and events, the ocean of time in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after nor before” (Mbiti 22). The “now-point” and “unlimited past” of many varieties of African time, including the

time consciousness of the Xhosa, is in direct contrast with the past, present, and future linearity of traditional western time.

In the same way that Mda challenges the linear relationships between the past and the present, *Heart of Redness* also draws connections between “memory, experience, and expectation” (Wenzel 163). Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone point out that memories are “dispersed and transmitted to subsequent generations ... what emerges is a sense of sliding, elusive truths, which change shape and meaning” (27). Mda utilizes memory to rewrite, or re-remember the history of the Xhosa. An important element of time in the novel is seen in the act of remembering and forgetting; furthermore, these actions remain in the forefront of the novel through the memory rituals. The Xhosa nonbelievers create the memory ritual to connect the past and the present, and to redefine what is remembered, and therefore what is considered in the past, in turn, can affect the present. The memory ritual of the Xhosa appears several times throughout the novel. As Camagu witnesses the ritual, the narrator describes,

In a slow rhythm the elders begin to dance. It is a painful dance. One can see the pain on their faces as they lift their limbs and stamp them on the ground. They are all wailing now, and mumbling things like people who talk in tongues...they are going into a trance that takes them back to the past. To the world of the ancestors. Not the Otherworld where the ancestors live today. Not the world that lives parallel to our world. But to this world when it still belonged to them. When they were still people of flesh and blood like the people who walk the world today.

(73)

This description makes it clear that the memory rituals of the Xhosa connect the present time of the “now” back to the past time of the ancestors. In fact, throughout the novel, when Mda manipulates the narrative time and shifts from the 1856 narrative to the 1994 narrative, the shift occurs after a reference to the memory rituals. For example,

They are invoking grief by engaging in a memory ritual. In their trance they fleet back through the Middle Generations, and linger in the years when their forebears were hungry.

Hunger had seeped through the soil of the land of the amaXhosa. It also fouled the ill-gotten lands of the neighboring amaMfengue. (74)

And,

It was too late for Twin and his fellow Believers to close their ears to avoid being contaminated by such blasphemy.

Camagu tells Xoliswi Ximiya about the memory ritual of the Unbelievers. The graceful pain captivated him. (87)

Both of these transitions, the first moving from the future to the past, and the second moving from the past to the future, are connected to the memories of the Unbelievers. Their memory ritual creates the past time and brings it to prominence in the present. If the two storylines interact and influence the other, eventually culminating in the combined, ambiguous time of Qukezwa and Heitsi at the beach, then two time lines could be considered one story. Instead of using anachronic devices of analepsis or prolepses, by representing events out of chronological order, the memory rituals create a form of social

flashback—a past created out of the act of remembering. As already examined, the textual transitions between the past and present narrative are triggered by repeated images or actions; however, it is also important to note that the act of remembering, and interchanging timelines, is often accompanied by harsh or unpleasant emotions. For instance, the connecting transition words throughout the text possess a negative connotation. “Stone/stone” (106), “hungry/hunger” (74), “scars/scars” (113), and “blasphemy/rubbish” (87), each mark transitions that highlight the emotional pain and discomfort associated with revisiting the Xhosa past. As seen with the TRC, vocalizing memories of trauma and pain leads to healing. And as seen, Lyn Graybill suggests that individuals tell painful memories to reshape and “reintegrate it [the past] into the matrix of their lives” (164). The shifts in narrative time at moments of trauma and pain, symbolize for the novel a moment of healing – moment where the past and the present integrate.

This memory of trauma is characteristic of post-apartheid South Africa according to Paul Antze and Michael Lambek who state, “increasingly, memory worth talking about –worth remembering—is memory of trauma” (xii). Mda’s version of the memory rituals of the Xhosa involves a connection to the emotional pain of the Cattle Killing and the traumatic memory of the people. Repeatedly, characters reinforce that the purpose of the memory ritual is to provoke a deep sorrow. After trying to escape the sorrow and fear from seeing the ritual, Camagu is confronted by NoPetticoat. She states, “there is nothing to be afraid of. They are merely inducing sadness in their lives, so that they may have a greater appreciation of happiness” (73). Later, Camagu tells Xoliswa Ximiya about the “graceful pain that captivated him” in the memory rituals (87). Within the memory

rituals, Mda's characters chose what is to be remembered, and therefore, what elements of the past are able to remain in the present. In many ways the memory rituals of the *Unbelievers* mirrors the action confession and memory of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This novel, through the blurred time and merged timelines of the historic Cattle Killing and the new democratic South Africa, is speaking directly to the development of a new South African identity, and a new post-apartheid imagined community. Benedict Anderson speaks of imagined communities as a socially constructed group of people who are connected because they imagine themselves to be a part of the community; furthermore, he states, "having to 'have already forgotten' tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be 'reminded' turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies" (201). The development of imagined communities is dependent on this act of cultural forgetting; furthermore, Anderson states, "all profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristics of amnesias" (204). An example of this amnesia can be seen in a grown adult looking at a picture of him or herself as a young child. The adult cannot remember the consciousness that he or she once possessed as a child, and that experience must be narrated from an outside source. In the same way, the consciousness of the Xhosa clan, and all South Africans, was irreversibly modified through colonization and subsequent apartheid. Like individuals, nations, "need...a narrative of identity" (205). The emerging nation develops a new national time narrative, outside of serial, chronological time, that is pieced together through a collective act of forgetting some events while remembering the others.

*The Heart of Redness* is concerned with writing the new national identity of the Xhosa people, and the people of South Africa after apartheid. This new narration can be seen in the prevalence of the Xhosa time concept, and through the act of creating new memories and forgetting others. The memory ritual of the Unbelievers was not a native ritual to the community. In fact, NoPetticoat tells Camagu:

Even the Unbelievers of today. When the sad times passed and the trials of the Middle Generations were over, it became necessary to create something that would make them appreciate this new happiness of the new age...the revival of unbelief meant that Unbelievers must learn anew how to celebrate unbelief.

Xoliswa's father was one of those who were sent to the hinterland to borrow the dances and trances of the abaThwa that take one to the world of the ancestors.

(74)

The memory ritual itself represents an effort to rewrite the community's narrative. In participating in the rituals, and remembering the events of the past, while forgetting hardships that would tear the community apart, the community progresses with a new identity and a rewritten past. The memory ritual itself creates a new time for the community.

Anderson asserts that nations function outside of time, in that they have no identifiable birth or demise; instead, the biography of a nation is often structured around deaths of citizens. He states, "to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths must be remembered/forgotten as 'our own'" (206). As the community enacts the ritual as a whole, it must learn to "celebrate unbelief"; in doing so, the community feels the sadness and sorrow from generations past. However, through memory, the sorrow builds the new

narrative of the Xhosa and South African people. In *The Heart of Redness* Zakes Mda successfully shapes a novel that speaks to the new narrative following the fall of apartheid; however, it is important to note that both he and Magona composed their novels several years following President Mandela's election and inauguration. While apartheid was officially placed within the past time of South Africa, through *Heart of Redness* and *Mother to Mother*, both authors reveal that the apartheid past still effects the democratic present. To counteract this legacy, Mda and Magona attempt to reclaim a past beyond apartheid, a past of tradition and Xhosa time.

## CHAPTER 4

“PERHAPS NOT YET” –  
 RECONCILIATION IN *MOTHER TO MOTHER* AND *HEART OF REDNESS*  
 AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

*Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika  
 Maluphakanyisw' uphondo lwayo,  
 Yizwa imithandazo yethu,  
 Nkosi sikelela, thina lusapho lwayo.*

*God bless Africa  
 Raise high Her glory  
 Hear our prayers  
 God bless us, we her children*

*Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso,  
 O fedise dintwa le matshwenyeho,  
 O se boloke, O se boloke setjhaba sa heso,  
 Setjhaba sa South Afrika – South Afrika.*

*God, protect our nation  
 End all wars and tribulations  
 Protect us, protect our nation,  
 our nation, South Africa - South Africa*

*Uit die blou van onse hemel,  
 Uit die diepte van ons see,  
 Oor ons ewige gebergtes,  
 Waar die kranse antwoord gee,*

*Ringing out from our blue heavens,  
 From our depth of our seas,  
 Over our everlasting mountains,  
 Where the echoing crags resound,*

*Sounds the call to come together,  
 And united we shall stand,  
 Let us live and strive for freedom,  
 In South Africa our land.*

*Sounds the call to come together,  
 And united we shall stand,  
 Let us live and strive for freedom,  
 In South Africa our land.*

*~South African National Anthem Established 1997*

*“The time for the healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us.”*

*~Nelson Mandela Inaugural Address, May 10, 1994*

Nelson Mandela’s inauguration as the first democratically elected black South African president in May of 1994 was a seminal moment in the development of a South African nation, which was no longer defined under the constraints of apartheid. As the age of apartheid, and the time of interregnum leading to the elections came to an end, idealism for unity and prosperity abounded. In his inaugural address, Mandela stated,

“We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be ... assured of their inalienable right to human dignity--a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world” (Mandela, 1994). The idea of the “Rainbow Nation” as a metaphorical representation of the New South Africa permeated all aspects of the nation’s culture and through the mid to late 90’s South Africa became known as the land of miracles to the rest of the world. The “rainbow nation” became popular as a catch phrase and political slogan, with the rainbow becoming a symbol “exploited for commercial purposes as well as political ends” (Moller 246). The development of the rainbow metaphor and the action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were not the only forces within South Africa fighting for unity and against the legacy of apartheid. A transition within the literary environment paralleled the journey of the nation as many post-apartheid writers spoke of restoration and in doing so, vocalized a united South Africa. Like other post-apartheid writers, Sindiwe Magona and Zakes Mda emulate the action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and speak reconciliation in their works; furthermore, both *Heart of Redness* and *Mother to Mother* create a new history, and a new time for the South African people, through the stories of Mxolisi, Mandisa, and the villagers of Qolorha by the Sea. Ultimately, by reclaiming and redefining the past, Mda and Magona assist in the development of the imagined community of the New South Africa, and essentially, “restart” the cycle of Xhosa time.

The fall of apartheid initially affected South African society on every level, including literature. While the institution of separation was dismantled officially, South African writers were still left with the colonial legacy of centuries of colonization and oppression that divided the nation racially in to arbitrary classifications. South African

apartheid literature drew close artistic expression and public power which “forced novelists into the public domain,” because all literature was either regulated by the apartheid regime, or was a political message by anti-apartheid movements (Poyner 103-05). All writing was politically motivated, and literature represented an active struggle between the artist and the state. Critic Pauline Fletcher states that the “That noxious system [of apartheid] has given writers a subject of great power and moral urgency... [however,] South African literature has been held hostage by apartheid” (12). The captivity of South African literature under apartheid crossed the national divide of color, and affected white and black writers.

In a 2004 interview, Zakes Mda speaks out concerning the relationship with the writer and literature under apartheid. He states:

In South Africa, a society that was characterized by racial oppression and economic exploitation, the dominant discourse in society was apartheid, and, as you know, artists get their material from society; if the dominant discourse in society is politics, then the work will reflect that. Apartheid was a political system that touched on every aspect of the people's lives. It was a form of social engineering where the government controlled everything that a person could or could not do...So, even if you wanted to write a simple love story, you couldn't in all honesty without touching on politics because politics regulated even that private area of a person's life. (2004)

During the years of apartheid, Mda wrote his plays from Lesotho, a small independent country within South Africa; however, Mda felt the effects of the political oppression when his works were banned from the country of his birth (65).

With the first democratic elections in 1994, many writers witnessed the actualization of the purpose of South African literature for the past 40 years. At this point of political transition, Mda made a transition in his art, transferring his literary attention to the novel. He states of his new genre choice:

The only reason I moved from playwriting to novel writing was a very political one. In South Africa, as you know, we lived under a horrendous political system. It was oppressive to the artist not only because the state banned books but also because there was pressure on us as artists to use our art as a weapon against apartheid. This pressure came from us--we ourselves imposed these demands. We needed work that would directly talk to the people--like poetry. Our poetry is not written on the page for the solitary reader, but for performance. You go out and perform it. We needed plays because plays are immediate. They talk directly to the audience, and they deal with issues, and the audience responds--there is that immediate feedback. (67)

The primary concern for an entire generation of writers was to bring light to the atrocities of apartheid, and to speak revolutionary political change. Like Mda, Andrew Foley is quick to point out that with the “rapid dismantling of the apartheid state, many writers suddenly found themselves having to reorient their work, having to redefine their purpose, having to seek out and explore new and different concerns” (128). Many hoped that at this juncture, South African literature would create new narratives that would emerge bring about a new national identity outside of apartheid.

Unlike literature under apartheid, which primarily utilized an outward political focus, South African literature after the mid-90’s focuses the attention inwardly, and

many writers emphasize reflection and self-questioning (Poyner 103). Foley asserts that post-apartheid literature seems concerned primarily with the dual actions of seeking truth and reconciliation. Like the TRC, post-apartheid fictional narratives also look to the past in order to interpret the present. Authors do not simply reveal the truth concerning South Africa's apartheid and colonized past, but many ask honest questions, and present the truth concerning current issues and predicaments facing South Africa during the time of transition (Foley 132). Both types of truth are balanced in the narration, and many works also move towards a form of reconciliation. Foley states that this reconciliation is "certainly at the level of individual human beings, but also by metaphorical extrapolation at the level of the multiple polarities of the nation itself" (132).

A key way in which authors utilize the mode of truth and reconciliation within fiction is through counter-histories. During apartheid, counter-histories within South African culture played an important role in organizing resistance movements and mobilizing individuals against apartheid. Sten Pultz Moslund describes the counter-histories and narratives within South Africa, stating that the stories "emerge when the objectified, the Othered, the oppressed assume the power of definition and assert realities, of past and present, that refute or challenge the master narrative" (15). In the post-apartheid era, authors center their focus on redefining the master narrative, not to simply stimulate a political response, but to reclaim and restore histories that had been excluded, and manipulated within the apartheid culture. The system of apartheid, and the centuries of colonialism that preceded it, brought the destruction of traditional communities and the traditions that held these communities together. Sam Durrant states that "literature becomes a crucial site not simply for the recovery of communal traditions of

remembrance but for the reinvention of memorial practices and thus the reinvention of community” (441). This observation on the power of literature within post-apartheid South Africa is reminiscent of Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, in which he describes nationalism as the formation of any group identity based on a distant or mythic past that confirms the existence of the group as a whole. Anderson terms this underlying cultural connection, “Self-evident plausibility” (12).

Post-apartheid novels, such as *Mother to Mother* and *Heart of Redness*, seek to rediscover the “self-evident plausibility” of the Xhosa people in particular, and South Africa as a community. Mda and Magona are successful in speaking truth and reconciliation through the ways in which they reexamine and reinterpret the Cattle Killing, and in their manipulations of time. As seen in *Mother to Mother*, the conflicts between the linear time of the West with the cyclical time of the Xhosa, are not simply stylistic decisions to enhance aesthetic readability. Instead Magona uses these time differences to question the supremacy of Western time and to show the validity of African and Xhosa time concepts. Along these same lines, Mda presents an example of the Xhosa time consciousness. The movement of history in *The Heart of Redness* mirrors the past/present relationship of the Xhosa, instead of the past, present, future progression of the west. While Magona and Mda’s choices are important in revealing key characteristics of the Xhosa, when the time elements and the Cattle Killing retellings are viewed in conjunction with the reconciling nature of post-apartheid counter-histories and Anderson’s view of “self-evident plausibility,” *Mother to Mother* and *Heart of Redness* quickly transform into defining texts for the new South African community. Jane Poyner states that post-apartheid literature “confirms that the need to retrieve and bear witness to

a suppressed and censored past is now vital, that history will be constitutive in shaping South Africa's future (106). In reexamining the past, and redefining the time structures, Mda and Magona, following the precedent of the TRC, speak reconciliation and truth to South Africa's present and subsequent future.

The Cattle Killing of 1856–1857 is presented in different techniques in *Heart of Redness* and *Mother to Mother*. Despite the fact that Magona narrates the events of the Cattle Killing for the mere length of ten pages and Mda structures the happenings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Xhosa as a central plot of the novel, both authors transform the story from the belief of the traditional historical narrative of the Cattle Killing that was propagated during apartheid. In the case of *Mother to Mother*, readers learn the details of the Cattle Killing from Mandisa's grandfather. In a moment of analeptic time, Tatomkhulu asks Mandisa, "Have your teachers taught you anything about Nongqawuse?" Mandisa responds to her grandfather: "She [Nongqawuse] was a false prophet who told people to kill all their cattle and they would get new cattle on the third day." She continues that the people killed their cattle "because they were superstitious and ignorant" (175). At this, Tatomkhulu states, "These liars, your teachers, but, what can one expect? After all, they are paid by the same boer government . . . the same people who stole our land" (176). At this point, Magona sets up Mandisa's response as a reflection of the official history that is taught to South African students—the official history that takes away the Xhosa connection to both the spiritual traditions of the prophets, and the connection to the Xhosa "unlimited past" (Mbiti 28). As already noted, the Xhosa concept of the future is linked intricately with past. As the dominant culture manipulates the stories of Xhosa history, including the story of the Cattle Killing, not only is Anderson's "Self-evident

plausibility” removed, which connects the people as a community, but the community also has no way to continue.

Tatomkhulu goes on to correct both his granddaughter and the Xhosa people, because the narrative states that he begins to speak “in the voice of an *imbongi* of the people” (176). In traditional Xhosa culture, the *imbongi* memorized the oral history of the people. In his study concerning Xhosa poets and poetry, Jeff Opland states that the *imbongi*

Acted as the spokesman of the people...his ability to arouse emotions was especially noticeable in times of war, when he inspired the warriors to acts of bravery. By constant references to his *izibongo* [loyalty and praise] to the chief’s genealogy and the history of the group, he not only acted as an ethnic history book but also molded communal solidarity (17).

In essence, the *imbongi* is the keeper of the Xhosa collective memory. Tatomkhulu returns to the mythic time of the past and states:

Deep run the roots of hatred here  
 So deep, a cattle-worshipping nation killed all its precious herds.  
 Tillers, burned fertile fields fully sowed, bearing rich promise too.  
 Readers of Nature’s Signs, allowed themselves fallacious belief.  
 In red noon’s eye rolling back to the east for sleep.  
 Anything. Anything, to rid themselves of these unwanted strangers.  
 No sacrifice too great, to wash away the curse. (176)

It is important to note, that Magona's fictional imbongi oration is comparable to documented poetry. For example during research in 1975, Opland recorded the following oral poem from David Yali-Manisi, a traditional Xhosa imbongi. Yali-Manisi states,

The great dog, the child of Grey,  
 Who is called big George,  
 The son of Grey,  
 Said he was rearranging the land,  
 Yet in this time of abhorrence and shame  
 He stood apart and shaded his eyes,  
 Watching the result of the piling of corpses.  
 People lay stark without any shots fired.  
 Because they knew how to crawl on their bellies,  
 Avoiding the cannon as they made towards the killer.  
 Ncincilili! [I disappear!]  
 Ncincilili. [I disappear!]. (195)

The key elements of both the fictional and actual orations are similar. Both Tatomkhulu and Yali-Manisi state that the girl gave a false prophecy but that she was not to blame; instead, she was prompted by the colonizers. In telling the Cattle Killing story that reflects the beliefs of the Xhosa people, Magona provides a counter-story that causes the past to become malleable and open to include counter-histories. Additionally, Magona validates the Xhosa method of reactivating history into the present. Magona gives the imbongi voice and agency within the novel and, therefore, calls for the tradition to be

revitalized within present-day South Africa. The novel ends in the imbongi voice.

Mandisa states:

My son, the blind but sharpened arrow of the wrath of his race.

Your daughter, the sacrifice of hers.

Blindly chosen.

Flung towards her sad fate by fortune's cruelest slings.

But for the chance of a day, the difference of one sun's rise,

My son, perhaps not a murderer.

Perhaps, not yet. (210, line breaks added)

In writing the novel, and in connecting the present back to the past, Magona acts as the imbongi for the Xhosa.

Unlike Magona, Mda does not present the story of the Cattle Killing through an oral tradition; instead, Mda focuses his novel on the event and reveals how the effects of the past are still active in post-apartheid South Africa. Mda reclaims and reimagines the Xhosa colonial past, while writing back against the history of power. Renee Schatteman emphasizes that the novel “does not automatically condemn Nongqawuse and her followers, even while they acknowledge that the prophecies resulted in the deaths of thousands. The overall effect is that the prophetess’ influences of the Xhosa in 1856 is not written off as mass hysteria” (290). While the tone of Mda and Magona’s depiction of the Cattle Killing is similar, Mda accounts for a different explanation for the horrendous events that devastated the Xhosa nation. Unlike Magona, Mda rejects the traditional “black myth” of the killings, which visualizes the event as Governor George Grey’s manipulation of Nongqawuse; however, Mda also rejects what Jana Gohrisch terms “the

white myth,” in which the Cattle Killing was the unsuccessful plot of Xhosa chiefs against colonizers (240).

As seen previously, the memory ritual of the Xhosa, borrowed for the Khoikhoi, allows the Middle Generation in the novel to reconnect and re-imagine the past. In many ways, *Heart of Redness* serves as a memory ritual for the disconnected generation of apartheid; and Mda’s retelling of the Cattle Killing, allows the “Middle Generation,” the generation of apartheid, to reconnect to the shared memory of the Xhosa. By not crediting the Cattle Killing to either the chiefs or the colonizers, Mda calls for responsibility to be placed on all Xhosa both Believers and Unbelievers; furthermore, in revealing responsibility, Mda also calls for action. This action is memory.

Another way in which Mda presents a counter-history of the Cattle Killing is the fact that he never questions the validity of those who believe in the power of the Nongqawuse’s prophecy; in fact, those who believe that the prophecy could have been fulfilled, are presented in the same light as the Unbelievers. In the end of the novel, Camagu, an outsider, reveals that belief is the connecting point between the Xhosa past and present. He states,

Believers are sincere in their belief. In this whole matter of Nongqawuse I see the sincerity of belief...It is the same sincerity of belief that has been seen throughout history and continues to be seen today where those who believe actually see miracles. (245)

Like the Believers borrowed the memory ritual that kept their belief alive, Camagu similarly borrows the history of the Cattle Killing to help him discover his place in the new South Africa. Nongqawuse’s prophecy is given credence in the fact that throughout

the narrative, Mda prompts readers to question if all the Xhosa had participated in the Cattle Killing, would the prophecy have been fulfilled.

Both *Heart of Redness* and *Mother to Mother* end in a moment connected to the Xhosa concept of the past. In the case of *Mother to Mother*, Mandisa places her son within the Cattle Killing narrative, stating that “the difference of one sun's rise” would have kept her son from being a murder. This particular sunrise dually represents the start of the day Amy is murdered, and the second sunrise of the Cattle Killing prophecy. The ending of *Heart of Redness* likewise connects to the Xhosa past as Qukezwa and Heitsi play near the sea in a blended, hybrid time. In this scene, the time, whether the past or the present narrative, is ambiguous.

Even though both novels end clearly revealing intricate elements of Xhosa time, at first glance, it appears that the novels end with a negative perspective. This observation is problematic, because if Mda and Magona fashion their novels to speak to post-apartheid South Africa, then the negative tone would suggest a lack of forward progression for the post-apartheid people; however, this is not to say that the novels possess a fairy-tale ending in which every aspect of the narrative is whole and the characters are healed. The ending of both novels reveals the still fractured state of the nation. Foley is quick to point out that many writers, “whether in a misplaced commitment to nation-building, or under the pressures of political solidarity, have found themselves incapable of writing with any degree of critical objectivity or truthfulness about the realities of the new society” (133). Contrastingly, Mda and Magona openly explore the genuine hardships facing the people of South Africa and never suggest that the reconciliation of the community could, or even should, occur overnight. Instead,

through *Heart of Redness* and *Mother to Mother*, both authors reveal that the starting place of the future is the past.

The setting and the action of *Mother to Mother* remains dark and ominous throughout the novel. Jennifer Wenzel refers to the novel as “*postapocalyptic*” and depicts a world of destruction without millennial renewal (167). In *Mother to Mother* Magona is more concerned with the cost of the struggle than with providing a confident prediction of a new South African nation. In an interview in 1999, shortly following the publication of *Mother to Mother*, Magona states that following the elections in 1994, she was afraid that South Africans would “wake up in five years or ten years and be badly surprised and angry...people will be disillusioned because they were expecting far too much, more than could be delivered” (1990). Instead of presenting an utopian image of South Africa, Magona instead “forgo[s] judgment, embrace[s] irresolution, and seek[s] out transcendent answers or possibilities for contemporary South Africa” (Schatteman 290). Schatteman states that Magona is able to develop a narrative that exposes possibility by “rejecting the politics of blame” (290). When discussing the effects of the TRC, political scientist James Gibson states, “Sharing responsibility, blame, and victimhood creates a common identity, which can provide a basis for dialogue. If people are no longer dogmatically attached to a “good versus evil” view of the struggle, then perhaps a space for reconciliation is opened” (420). It is this “basis for dialogue” that Magona is successful in creating through *Mother to Mother*.

The ambiguity in the final scene of *Heart of Redness* leaves readers questioning the meaning behind Heitsi’s statement: “No, mama! No! This boy does not belong in the sea! This boy belongs in the man village!” (277). This concluding statement of the novel

has prompted many interpretations concerning Mda's intent and the final statement to the readers. Many scholars view Heitsi's final quote as a statement of belonging, but Rita Barnard asserts that "the idea of belonging, the idea of the bounded village, and the idea of salvation: these are precisely the notions that Mda's narrative has worked to complicate" (171).

Heitsi's choice of the village over the sea, can be seen through an ecological lens as a choice of civilization over nature. Klopper states,

By identifying the "man village" rather than the land in general as his place of belonging, the boy specifically lays claim to a human habitation, a social context, affirming the value of culture (the social and the domestic) above the value of nature (the untamed and the uncontained). (97)

Klopper also admits that this specific view is ironic when juxtaposed with the claim that Qukezwa's son is the embodiment or representation of the KhoiKhoi Heitsi-Eibib who was able to manifest in many natural forms and who lead his people through the river from his enemies. Another view of the ending is that Heitsi's rejection of the sea symbolizes his rejection of "people over prophecy and the future over the past" (Attwell 201). Likewise, Meg Samuelson relies on Anne McClintock's views of gender and the nation to explore Mda's choice of allowing Heitsi to have the final voice in the novel, and to explore the meaning behind his choice. McClintock states, "Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking, and natural)...men, by contrast represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent, and historic)" (92). Samuelson in turn suggests that Heitsi's

choice undermines the authority of both women and the past, and that “the man’s village” represents a forward-moving nation.

Alongside these perspectives, because the central event of the novel is the Cattle Killing, it is important to examine the final scene in conjunction with Xhosa mythology and Nongqawuse’s prophecy. The image of the sea is an active player in the Cattle Killing prophecy and the Xhosa history. Historian Wyatt MacGaffey, points out that in the seventeenth century, many African communities believed that white colonizers lived under the ocean (Braun 426). In a report by John Campbell in 1815 concerning his travels through Africa, in an encounter with a Xhosa chief he was told, “They [colonizers] had no business in his country, but should have kept in their own, meaning the sea” the Xhosa “thought they [Europeans] had risen up from the bottom of the sea, having seen the top mast first, then gradually more and more till they beheld the hull, which make them conclude they were natives of the water” (526). In fact, the Xhosa name given to white colonizers was *abelungu*, which translates to “people of the sea” (Mabona 295). In addition to a symbol of colonial conquest, the sea also plays an important role in the fulfillment of the Cattle Killing prophecy. In the prophecy, if the Xhosa fulfilled the conditions of the slaughter, that when the sun rose for a second time, “The ancestors would return bringing with them herds of wonderful beasts, and newly dug grain pits would fill up, the whites would disappear into the sea, and all would be well” (Ross 57).

The second image in the final scene with Heitsi and Qukezwa is “the man village.” Most interpretations see this representation as a negative choice for Heitsi, either rejecting nature or rejecting his past; however, when examining the Xhosa concepts of belonging, Mda leaves readers with a positive scene for the new South

African community. In Xhosa language and culture, the idea of community identity is link by both an individual's mother and father. *Kulo Ma* translates "my mother's home country/ home village," and *kuloBawo* means "my father's home country/ home village" (Mabona 39). When Heitsi states, "This boy does not belong in the sea! This boy belongs in the man village!" (277), he is referencing his *kuloBawo*, the home of his father. Moreover, he is rejecting the sea, which represents progress by means of western principles, and embracing the paternal village which encompasses the Xhosa history and past.

Through *Mother to Mother* and *Heart of Redness*, Zakes Mda and Sindiwe Magona present readers with a portrait of the Cattle Killing of 1856-1857, which in turn informs a perspective of the new South Africa. Post-apartheid writers, like Mda and Magona develop literature powerful "in its transformative potential, its ability to grapple with legacies of oppression and imagine new states of being and even new beings of the state" (Durrant 441). Mda and Magona are successful in presenting "new beings" of the South African state; moreover, this primarily results from the novel's emphasis on the past, and inclusion and validation of Xhosa time concepts.

Because both novels were written in the decade following Mandela's election, *Heart of Redness* and *Mother to Mother* present a cautious view of South Africa future. In fact, as seen, both novels end in an unresolved space; moreover, Mandisa imagines her son "perhaps not yet" a murderer, and Heitsi rejects the sea in favor of the village. The ambiguous nature of the ending mirrors the ambiguous future of South Africa. Despite, the overwhelming optimism of government leaders and the progression of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission many were critical of the new found unity of South Africa. In

fact, in an interview in 1998, Winnie Mandela stated, “There is no black in the rainbow. Maybe there is no rainbow after all (Mandela 1998). In a report also published in 1998, researchers examined levels of happiness and life satisfaction among South Africans during apartheid and the decade following. The results states,

During the apartheid era black South Africans indicated markedly lower levels of happiness and satisfaction in all spheres of life than their white counterparts. The gap between black and white subjective well-being closed temporarily after the first universal franchise elections held on April 27, 1994 only to widen again eighteen months later. (27)

*Mother to Mother* and *Heart of Redness* were both written within five years of Winnie Mandela’s statement, and the publication of these results. Magona and Mda were by no means writing in a blindly optimistic society; however, by writing back to the time prior to the development of the post-apartheid nation, with Mxolisi and the villagers of Qolorha by the Sea, both novels motivate the present audience to look back and remember the past and to allow the past to shape. While the present day state of South Africa remains outside the visionary “Rainbow Nation” moniker, Mda and Magona present a realistic image of the post-apartheid nation. This image, however, is not lacking hope, and in many ways both *Mother to Mother* and *Heart of Redness* motivate South Africa to look to the past, not the mire of Apartheid, but to the traditions and reconciling time concepts of the Xhosa. Both novels leave the readers, and the new South Africa in the time of “perhaps not yet.”

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